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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002246

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/16/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [SY](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PM MALIKI, CODEL MCCAIN DISCUSS KIRKUK, MEDDLING
BY NEIGHBORS

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher R. Hill, for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: In an August 14 meeting with PM Maliki, Senator McCain congratulated the PM for the impressive progress in Iraq since his last visit. PM Maliki acknowledged the significant security gains and pointed to the tremendous sacrifices of both Iraqis and Americans. Regarding Arab-Kurd tensions and the issue of Kirkuk, the PM emphasized the need to resolve differences peacefully, in accordance with the Iraqi Constitution. He expected a Kurdish team in Baghdad soon to follow up on his August 2 visit to Dokhan (where he met newly elected KRG President Barzani). Maliki noted that in the run-up to elections, terrorists affiliated with al-Qaida or Baathist elements were launching attacks to create sectarian and ethnic divisions and to persuade the parties to resort to violence over Kirkuk and other issues. Maliki insisted there is a tremendous amount of outside intervention from the region (backed with large sums of money), attempting to shape the formation of coalitions and the outcome of the elections. While refusing to name specific countries, PM Maliki carefully expressed the hope that "our Sunni brothers" in the region would not intervene in the elections, while making clear he believed such intervention was already taking place. When Sen. Collins asked why the GOI was not doing more to encourage the return of refugees, Maliki outlined a range of factors keeping the refugees abroad. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Senators John McCain, Joe Lieberman, Susan Collins, and Lindsey Graham (CODEL McCain) met August 14 with Iraqi PM Nouri al-Maliki. CODEL McCain was accompanied by Ambassador Hill, General Odierno, POL M/C Grappo, and Poloff notetaker. PM Maliki was joined by senior PM Advisor Sadiq Rikabi.

Handling Arab-Kurd Tensions

¶3. (C) After expressing satisfaction with the tremendous progress Iraq has witnessed in the past months, Sen. McCain asked about how the PM intended to handle Arab-Kurd tensions and the issue of Kirkuk. The PM acknowledged the security gains made in Iraq over the past month, noted the sacrifices of ordinary Iraqis, and expressed gratitude for America's sacrifices. Regarding Arab-Kurd tensions, Maliki acknowledged the frictions and underscored the importance of resolving them peacefully, in accordance with the Iraqi Constitution, and in coordination with the Kurdistan Regional Government. He said he had gone to Dokhan (to meet with Kurdish leaders Barzani and Talabani) August 2 -- and invited a follow-up team to Baghdad -- to underline the necessity of this approach. He added that he was working closely on the issue with the Ambassador, General Odierno, and Vice President Biden (who he confirmed had called earlier that day). Maliki noted that in the run-up to elections, terrorists (al-Qaida and Baathist elements) were launching attacks to create sectarian and ethnic divisions and to persuade the parties to resort to violence to resolve the conflict.

Kirkuk and Peshmerga Integration

14. (C) Returning to the subject in response to a question from Sen. Graham about Kirkuk and Peshmerga integration, Maliki described Kirkuk as a very complicated issue, "a powder-keg" which if mishandled could have a negative impact not just in Iraq but region-wide. The PM explained that adherence to the Iraqi constitution, while important, is not sufficient. It was also necessary to agree as a first step on the borders of the Kirkuk governorate, something that was on the borders of the Kirkuk governorate, something that was proving difficult because the Presidency Council could not agree. Maliki said that the residents of Kirkuk should decide on the type of government they should have, referring to a formula for power sharing that he believed was fair. The PM explained the formula as requiring 32 percent of seats for Kurds, 32 percent for Arabs, 32 percent for Turkomen, and "six percent" for Christians. (Note: Last fall, Talabani brokered a 32/32/32/4 power-sharing deal with Kirkuk's leaders that would be reflected in the make-up of both the Provincial Council and civil service. Maliki was likely referring to this deal and misspoke when he said 32/32/32/6. End Note.)

15. (C) Regarding integration of Peshmerga forces, Maliki said these were regional forces and the Constitution stipulated that they could not be integrated "automatically," hinting at some of the difficulties involved in resolving this dispute with Barzani, but not elaborating further. (Note: At the August 2 Maliki-Barzani meeting at Dokhan, Maliki agreed to integrate Peshmerga in Kirkuk into the Iraqi Army, the mechanics of which will be hammered out in an

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upcoming meeting of the KRG-GOI joint team in Baghdad. End Note.)

Meddling by Neighbors

16. (C) In answer to Sen. Lieberman's question about which of Iraq's neighbors, Saudi Arabia or Iran, was causing greater problems, Maliki spoke primarily in general terms. He noted that most of the neighboring countries feared that a strong Iraq might get "too much of the limelight" given the country's oil wealth and its "golden connection" between Iranian Shia and Arab Sunni Muslims. In his view, a strong Iraq, not a divided, weak one, was the best guarantee for regional stability. Maliki said that, in the run-up to January 2009 parliamentary elections, there is already a tremendous amount of outside intervention (backed with large sums of money) trying to shape the formation of coalitions as well as the outcome of the elections. Getting a bit more specific, he expressed hope that "our Sunni brothers" will not intervene in the elections, while making clear that he believed such intervention was already underway. In answer to Sen. Graham's question about whether he supported integrating the Sunni group Sons of Iraq into Iraqi forces, Maliki offered an emphatic yes. He noted he had pressed the issue hard with the Council of Representatives, to obtain stronger budget support. Despite what he hoped was a temporary CoR rebuff, he was continuing to fund the program for the remainder of the year, even in the absence of any budget allocation.

Why Refugees Aren't Returning

17. (C) Sen. Collins asked the PM why the GOI was not making more of an effort to attract Iraqi refugees in the region to return home, noting that they had a lot to contribute to the rebuilding of Iraq. Maliki thanked her for getting the overall number (some one million) correct, instead of using what he termed the inflated figure of five to six million some mistakenly insisted on. (Maliki took issue with her

assertion that only 20,000 refugees had returned to Iraq. She clarified that she was referring to returnees this year.)

The PM offered several reasons why the number of refugees returning to Iraq was not greater. While denying that most of the refugees were Sunnis, Maliki insisted that many stay away not because they are fleeing danger but because they are in the "political opposition." Many stay abroad in the region as refugees, but return to Iraq regularly to visit families. He did acknowledge that some of the areas from which the refugees had fled (Diyala and Mosul, for example) were still dangerous and unstable. Others stayed away by choice, perhaps hoping to emigrate, he noted, saying that many refugees in Jordan were from areas in the middle and southern parts of Iraq that had been stabilized. Despite such obstacles to their return, Maliki said his government was focused on trying to facilitate their return and restore them to their former jobs. The PM expressed appreciation for the additional one hundred million dollars -- announced during his recent visit to Washington -- that the Obama Administration made available to help address this humanitarian situation.

18. (U) Codel McCain did not have the opportunity to review and clear this message.
HILL